A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF WORKING WOMEN IN SELECT FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH KOLKATA.

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SYNOPSIS

INTRODUCTION

The process of nation building involves in some respects the dissemination of information about and the commitment to the national unity. “By involving the majority of its citizens, political participation fosters stability and order through the re-enforcement of the legitimacy of political authority” (Lipset,1960,180). A society, in which a significant part of the population is denied any right to participation whatsoever, is likely to be highly explosive. Some other empirical studies also show that most people are just not especially politically oriented and political participation is not a "natural" concomitant of citizenship. Women are commonly constrained by the norms, beliefs, customs and values of the society creating separate codes of conduct for women and men (Kabeer 2000) Empowerment of women is suggested which signifies the expansion of freedom of choice and action (Mosedale, Malhotra,2003) based on the components like „*resources*“ and “*agency*“, where „*resources*“ are treated as the enabling factors (Kishor, 2000) and “*agency*“ as the ability to formulate strategic choices. In order to deal with the issue of empowerment efficiently, the concept of power has been introduced which is *power within*, *power to* and *power with*. Rowlands (1997) says ‘*power within’* signifies the assets like self-esteem and self-confidence of an individual, ‘*power to’* refers to productive or generative power which creates new possibilities and action without domination and as per Mosedale (2003) ‘*power with’* refers to collective action.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY.

Approach of the Eighth Plan marked a further shift from “development” to “empowerment’’ of women. Along with United Nations, Indian Government also had the objective to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDG**)** within 2015. The third MDG target is to empower women, but still, India lags well behind the target rate. This demands a minute enquiry to locate the exact causes of failure/successes that affect the achieved level of empowerment. A study of their experience could offer an incomparable window on the internal dynamics of social history. The cultural norms operate both as a restriction on a woman’s mobility as well as an impediment for her participation in the public sphere. Restricting women’s participation in these activities and community-based organizations has denied them opportunity of developing their skills required to

function as representatives in the public sphere. Hence, in this context it is essential to enquire whether there has been any change in their status, and if yes, how far this achieved change in status could uplift their position in the society. The main purpose of the present study is to make a comparative analysis of political orientation of working women in select formal (teachers and bank employees) and informal (street vendors and domestic workers) sectors of South Kolkata. It aims to study her cognitive orientation (i.e. her knowledge about political parties, symbols, their stay in power and their judgements about political system), her socio-economic security (i.e. her independent role in decision-making within the family in terms of investment , control over her income, taking major and minor decisions, nature of treatment meted out by family members or from the society at large, nature of such harassment if any and the kind of help received), affective orientation (her attachment towards the political system, issues and events, her interest in political and non-political forums) and evaluative orientation (her partisan preference and pattern of voting behaviour).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE.

The theories of the 1990s emphasised that the concept of gender was fluid over time and over social situations. Feminist scholars and activists began to engage with multiple identities and the ways in which multiple structures of inequality intersect. Professor Amartya Sen(1984) taking a much wider view of development talked of development as the process of expansion of entitlement — i.e. giving life sustenance and self- esteem — and capabilities : giving freedom though Nirmala Banerjee(1997) is of the opinion that whether or not this wage work improves her position should be assessed in terms of how far it makes it possible for her to strike out on her own on the strength of that income. Devaki Jain (2005) is of the opinion that the very beginning of women's quest was for ‘equality’ or for ‘overpowering’, if not effacing, ‘inequality’. Raka Ray (2000) in her book ‘Fields of Protest’ argues that it is the political field in which women’s movements of every city were embedded that determined the nature of women’s empowerment.

Large numbers of studies attempt to deal with the problems of defining as well as measuring empowerment. Some of these studies are theoretical and some are empirical. Oxaal and Baden (1997) classifies empowerment as *legal, political, economic* and *social empowerment.* Maxine Molyneux (1985) made the distinction between ‘practical gender needs’ and ‘strategic gender needs’ Naila Kabeer (1994) argues what is required is the unravelling of male power relations,

analysis of conflicting gender interests amongst women and create spaces which can be used for negotiating women's diverse interests. Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) provide a detailed conceptual framework of empowerment. Empowerment is explained by them in terms of a*gency* and *opportunity structure. Agency* is described in terms of *measurement of* and *action to enhance empowerment* and agency of a person/group is assessed by their asset endowment. Naila Kabeer in her book "*Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Developmental Thought"* argues what is required is the unravelling of male power relations, an analysis of conflicting gender interests among women based on their position in other power relations (e.g. race, class), shift in discourse from roles to relations, and prioritization of not just a planning solution but also a political solution. It is important for women to negotiate with social institutions. Kabeer (1994), Sen and Grown, (1985) not only measures empowerment but also detects the *causal factors* that regulate empowerment. They argue that structural conditions determine the distribution of resources among different categories of members in any society along with gender, class, caste and other lines. Sharma and Biswas (2008**) '**Women Empowerment, Household Condition and Personal Characteristics: Their Inter-Dependence in Developing Countries' examined the impact of employment status (i.e. whether employed or unemployed) of women separately on the household decision-makings. Considering the factors like monetary transactions, daily and large purchases, final say on husband's earnings etc an empowerment index is constructed separately for employed and unemployed women to compare their achieved levels of empowerment by their employment status.

Some studies have challenged the assumption that economic development and generational turnover are reducing sex differences in political participation. For examples studies of cross-national variation in women's status, including political status, conducted by J. F. Aviel 'Political participation of Women in Latin America' (1981), S. L. Wolchik's 'Ideology and Equality: the Status of Women in Eastern and Western Europe'(1981). Carole Pateman in 'Feminist Critique of the Public/Private Dichotomy'(1991)has not only pointed out the exclusionary nature of these boundaries but also the ways in which in different historical contexts negotiated with them to make them permeable or dismantled them redefining their mutual relationships. Gurpreet Mahajan (2003) terms it 'two modes of enhancing democratic citizenship' which results in coexistence for enhancing citizenship, their development is no longer seen as antagonistic, but of mutual respect overlying the ongoing process of democratization.

Women's political behaviour and their activities in the political arena are severely conditioned by the considerations of gender and patriarchy Dr. Samita Sen in her article 'Towards a feminist politics? The Indian women's Movement in Historical Perspective' has argued that the state has adopted a dual and paradoxical attitude towards the women's question. On the one hand the state plays a paternalistic role by "protecting" women through a range of pro-woman legislation while on the other hand seldom such legislations are fully implemented. This has led to the 'politicization of the personal laws' (Shiva Kumar Lal,2006). He analyses the effectiveness of legislative weapon for women empowerment and identifies the issues that affect this. The result is that empowerment of women in India is highly imbalanced along with huge gaps. Gender roles and traditional division of labour, illiteracy, economic barriers, the type of electoral system, lack of sufficient training etc have been keeping women away from politics.

RESEARCH GAP: A brief review of the existing literature on the status of women reveals some significant research gaps, although there are valuable contributions by scholars and researchers. Some of these points of gap may be mentioned here.

1. Voting participations have increased among women. They are taking more interest in those political matters that affect their day-to-day life. This role of women and their attitude towards politics can properly be understood not from an analysis of their political activities, attitudes and performances alone, but perhaps much more intimately from a thorough comparative analysis among various occupational status but in India, a comparatively smaller attempt has been made to understand the political status of women by comparing their role and attitude with those of their counterparts. Here exists, the researcher believes, an obvious gap in the researches on Indian women.

2. Urbanization is the key step in a society's march towards the status of modern nationhood. But, in case of women's studies, little systematic attempt has been made to compare the empowerment of women in urban set up. Most of the political science research has been on the comparative study of the differences in urban and rural conditions and the effect these differences have on political behaviour.

3. Most of the researches done so far have dealt with either the dual role played by women in their family and workplace or both but seldom there is any research on the triple role played by women in the family, workplace and as active citizens in the political affairs of the country.

4. There are many separate researches on the condition of women working in the unorganised sector like the Domestic workers and Hawkers and their pattern of political activism and participation in politics but there are no concrete research papers that focus on their individual decision- making role in matters of family, work and politics. Moreover, the researcher has not found concrete papers on the livelihood conditions of the two important categories in the service sector namely the Bank executives and Teachers. The present research will focus on these two categories.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DESIGN.

Broadly four questions are sought to be answered:

1) What is the pattern of cognitive orientation?

2) What is the position of the working women of Kolkata in terms of their independent decision-making within the family and sense of social security?

3) What is the pattern of their political interest and therefore their activism in political matters?

4) What is the line of their partisan preference and Voting Behaviour?

METHODOLOGY:

South Kolkata has been selected due to its rapid urbanization, its geographical location and other certain characteristics such as employment status and wide spread formal retail chain and street trading among all other regions of Kolkata. From the formal sector women in the teaching profession (school and college) and women working in private and public sector banks have been selected and from the informal sector domestic workers and street vendors have been selected. Only the permanent residents have been chosen in these areas. These clusters have been selected by using South Kolkata Map and the relevant wards under Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC). Purposive sampling was chosen since the survey focussed on specific occupational groups. Moreover, since household lists based on occupational strata is not available in Kolkata as per census or NSSO records, purposive sampling was the appropriate method. Also, there is always a chance that the original owner of that holding may shift to another place or state within India. Hence a particular area was chosen and each premises visited. The eligible participants from the selected ward were interviewed through a set questionnaire. Total 1000 working women (500 in the formal and 500 in the informal sectors) have been interviewed. The researcher has also used Chi-Square test for the analysis of the data. Government reports and various other research

publications constitute her secondary material. Relevant books and articles in journals have also been consulted**.**

Table 1: Total Sample Chosen from each Study Area

Name of the places.	**Total sample chosen.**			
	Street Vendors	**Domestic Workers**	**Teachers**	**Bank Employees**
Gariahat	**35**	**30**	**40**	**35**
Jadavpur	**40**	**30**	**40**	**30**
Bhawanipur	**40**	**35**	**35**	**30**
Park Circus	**35**	**40**	**30**	**35**
Rasbehari	**30**	**35**	**30**	**40**
Tollygunge	**30**	**40**	**30**	**40**
Behala	**40**	**40**	**45**	**40**
Total: 1000	**250**	**250**	**250**	**250**

For the purpose of analysis, the survey data have been analysed through several variables. These are (1) Age, (2) Caste (3) Religion (4) Marital status (5) Education, (6) Income.

For her analysis, the researcher has selected two categories of age.

A):25- 40 Years B) 41 – 60 Years

The income strata of the respondents have been divided as per the following category. In case of informal sector it is:

A) 0-15000 B) 15000-30000

And in case of the formal sector these are:

A)**0-50000 B) 50001-75000 C) 75001-100000 D) 100001-125000 E) 125001-150000 F) 150001-175000 G) 175001 and above**.

HYPOTHESIS:

The researcher has formulated the following hypotheses for the purpose of her study.

1. The present study of political orientation of working women in both formal and informal sector is likely to indicate that these women are likely to show low interest in politics. They are indifferent to political affairs and their information about politics is also at a low level. Their confidence about their own role in politics is low. Hence their participation in political activities is likely to be low.
2. Cognitive, affective and evaluative orientation may be independent of variables like age, caste, status, education, occupational status, family income and exposure to communication media.
3. Higher levels of political knowledge, a positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the family and also in the sphere of partisan choice, shape her political orientation and participation.

COGNITIVE ORIENTATION.

The political knowledge of the respondents have been analysed through a number of questions. The right answers were given 1 score and wrong answers 0.

Method of Classification :

Total Score = 12

Low Score = 0 – 4 (upto 33.33%)

Medium Score = 4.1 – 8 (upto 66.66%)

High Score = 8.1 – 12 (upto 100%)

Total 12 questions were asked to assess political knowledge. They are:

1)Name of the Party in power in WB 2) Actual No of yrs in power 3) Name of the Party in power at the Centre 4) Name of the party in power before the present party in WB.5) Name of the present Chief Minister 6) Who was the Chief Minister earlier? 7) Name of the present Prime Minister? 8) Which Political Party is he from? 10) Which province does he belong?11) Name of the earlier Prime Minister? 11) Who is the Present President of India 12) Which Province does he belong?

Sector	Group	Degree of Political Knowledge			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Informal	Street Vendors	0 (0.00%)	53 (20.00%)	212 (80.00%)	265 (100.00%)
	Domestic Worker	15 (5.77%)	98 (37.69%)	147 (56.54%)	260 (100.00%)
Formal	Bank Employees	6 (2.36%)	0 (0.00%)	248 (97.64%)	254 (100.00%)
	Teacher	2 (0.74%)	0 (0.00%)	270 (99.26%)	272 (100.00%)

SOCIAL SECURITY AND CHOICE OF DECISION-MAKING WITHIN THE FAMILY.

In this chapter, the researcher has analysed the relationship between socio-economic variables like age, caste, religion, education, level of family income, and occupational status with her sense of social security and her level of independent decision making within the family. Various studies undertaken on this issue indicate that there is a sex-related difference in political attitudes Generally, women have been socialized to values like submission, dependence, passivity and conformity. These culturally defined role values may be the important determinants of low politicization and weak political interest on the part of the women. Attitudes and beliefs, which are in part determined by social circumstances, influence citizens pattern of political behaviour.

RELATION BETWEEN POLITICAL INTEREST, VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND PARTISAN PREFERENCE.

In this chapter the researcher has analysed analyse the relationship between socio-economic attributes and the extent of political activism and political participation of the chosen respondents and her sense of independent decision making in the sphere of partisan choice and partisan preference. In order to understand the level of political interest the following questions were put forward before the respondents.

1A.Do you watch the Television?(yes-1,No-2)

B. Do you watch political news and discussions?(yes-1.No-2)

2. A. Do you listen to the radio? (Yes-1, No-2)

B. Do you hear political news and discussions? (Yes-1, No-2)

3. A. Do you regularly chat with your friends and neighbours during leisure time? (Yes-1, No-2)

B. Do you discuss national and international politics while chatting? (Yes-1, No-2)

C. Is any political person discussed in your adda(leisure)? (Yes-1, No-2)

4.A. Do you read books and pamphlets of any political party? (Yes-1, No-2)

B. If Yes, at what time?

5. Are you or any member of your family associated with any type of organisations like trade union, local club, School and College committees, youth organisations, puja committee etc? (Yes-1, No-2)

6. Are you or members of your family associated with the following activities? (Yes-1. No-2)

a. Participation in political meetings.

b. Participation in political campaigns.

c. Subscribing to any political party.

d. Collection of subscriptions for any political party.

e. Any other political activity.(Describe)

6. Have you ever placed any demand to an MLA/MP?(Yes-1, No-2)

7. Have you or your friends or relatives ever got any help from any political party regarding their physical survival? (Yes-1, No-2)

8. Do you resolve conflicts in your locality or workplace with the help of any political party? (Yes-1, No-2)

9. Have you or any of your friends or relatives ever got any help from any political party after any accident/emergency at home or at the workplace? (Yes-1. No-2)

Method of Classification :

Total Score = 9

Low Score = 0 – 3 (upto 33.33%)

Medium Score = 3.1 – 6 (upto 66.66%)

High Score = 6.1 – 9 (upto 100%)

Sector	Group	Degree of Political Interest			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
Informal	Street vendors	106 (40.00%)	132 (49.81%)	27 (10.19%)	265 (100.00%)
	Domestic Worker	123 (47.31%)	123 (47.31%)	14 (5.38%)	260 (100.00%)
Formal	Bank Staff	80 (31.50%)	137 (53.94%)	37 (14.57%)	254 (100.00%)
	Teacher	114 (41.91%)	134 (49.26%)	24 (8.82%)	272 (100.00%)

PARTISAN PREFERENCE.

In order to find out the opinion of the respondents on the question whether women should be guided by others in the sphere of partisan choice, or, whether they should vote independently, seven questions were put to them.

1. Do you cast your vote in favour of the same political party supported by your parents/husbands or in-laws or elders in the family? (Yes-1, No-2)

2. Do you cast your vote in favour of the same political party since the last 25 years? (Yes-1, No-2)

3. Have you changed your partisan preference after the end of the Left rule? (Yes-1, No-2)

4. Are you loyal to the same political party that came to solve your problems before 2011? (Yes-1, No-2)

5. Do you consult members of your family regarding in favour of whom to cast your vote before elections? (Yes-1, No-2)

6. Do you consult any outsider regarding in favour of whom to cast your vote before elections?(Yes-1, No-2)

7. After having discussions with family or outsiders, have you ever changed your voting behaviour? (Yes-1, No-2)

The respondents were again divided into trichotomized categories on the basis of the scores obtained by them. **In questions No 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 those who have given negative answers (i.e.2) have been considered to possess independent choice over decision-making in the sphere of partisan choice and is counted in score, but in question no 3, positive answer(i.e. 1) means independent and is counted in score . In 2011 there was a huge political change in West Bengal which marked the end of the 34 years of Left rule and the rise of the Trinamool Congress to the seat of power headed by a woman. Hence there was a significant change in the sphere of partisan choice especially among women.** Thus women with a more positive attitude towards independent decision-making were given higher scores.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS.

LEVEL OF COGNITIVE ORIENTATION.

A significant association between age, religion, education, income and political knowledge could not be observed among the respondents of the four categories covered by the study. The Null Hypothesis have been retained in all these variables. Women of both the age groups are aware of the names of political parties and figures irrespective of academic degree and income. However, women falling in the young age group of 25to 40 years have been found to be more aware of the political issues and discussions. With regard to caste and marital status, Null Hypothesis have been partially accepted. Within the informal sector domestic workers are found to be more apolitical than that of the street vendors and women of **scheduled caste** have secured less scores than the others. Again, early marriage has stalled the process of education among respondents. The nature of job and attitude of family members have acted as an impediment in acquiring knowledge in general and political knowledge in particular. Exposure to mass media and interaction with people have definitely played a major role in shaping the orientation of women especially in the informal sector towards politics.

LEVEL OF AFFECTIVE ORIENTATION BASED ON SOCIAL SECURITY AND INDEPENDENT ROLE IN THE FAMILY

It is observed that within the informal sector there is a vast difference on the extent of social security enjoyed by the two categories namely the domestic workers and street vendors. The domestic workers and their family members belonging to both the age groups have faced more harassment. The young women are the easy target of physical and mental harassment by the party cadres, police or municipal authorities and are victims of domestic violence not only in the hands

of their husbands but also other family members including their mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law. The scheduled caste and OBCs in both categories in the informal sector are targets of harassment and their grievances have not been redressed properly. As regards marital status we find that within the informal sector the domestic workers (100 women i.e.55.25%) who are married have faced more harassment than the street vendors (62 women i.e.38.01% out of 101. Knowledge helps to be aware of one's rights. However, it must be kept in mind that education and economic security cannot provide protection from rape, sexual assault or mental harassment. There is not much of a difference between the illiterate and the literate on this question. as evident in the data. Among street vendors, 37 women and among domestic workers 86 women have been victims. Even the women working in the formal sector are victims of domestic violence and even eviction from home.

In order to analyse women's choice over independent decision making, the researcher has attempted to study the control of women over her monthly savings and investment, her control over family expenditure like taking part in major and minor decisions in family matters and also her contribution to the family expenditure. As far as independent decision-making over self - expenditure is concerned women in the formal sector are better placed than the informal sector. In case of informal sector among street vendors younger women are more independent in terms of taking decisions on their own savings and investments than the domestic workers. Religion has played a deciding factor on womens' rights only in the case of Muslim women. This is applicable in both the sectors. They have had to struggle to get such rights. They are guided in every aspect of decision-making. So far as caste consideration are concerned, it is found that the women of general caste are slightly in a more advantageous position than that of other castes in matters of individual choice. Income is a variable which indicates the economic status of a person. In the present research we observe that with the rise of level of income the instances of harassment have become less but control of over their income by male members have increased in manifold. In some cases it was observed that higher the income slab greater is the level of control by the members of the family.

EVALUATIVE ORIENTATION BASED ON HER VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND INDEPENDENT CHOICE IN THE SPHERE OF PARTISAN PREFERENCE

From the data collected it has been observed that the women are not keen to be politically informed like their male counterparts and still not interested to get involved in political or even non-political activities even at the local level. In most cases it has been observed that they have been barred by the male members of the family from getting involved in political activities thereby resulting in low level of participation.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN NON-POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL SECTORS.

Organisations	Street vendor		Domestic workers		Bank Employee		Teachers	
	Head	Member	Head	Member	Head	Member	Head	Members
Peace-keeping	1	6	0	39	6	53	6	50
Local Club	0	135	0	161	40	82	42	79
Professional	0	0	0	0	48	81	64	78
Harisabha	0	14	0	1	0	3	6	12
Local party office	28	68	0	53	13	76	10	58
Trade Union	0	71	0	35	0	2	0	9
Youth Org	0	3	0	1	0	32	4	53
Women Org	0	23	0	18	1	42	1	33
Extension of education	0	18	0	3	3	18	5	50
Puja Committee	0	109	0	67	6	63	0	64
Local fair	0	102	0	67	2	51	0	44

PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Activities	Street Vendors	Domestic Workers	Bank Employees	Teachers
Political meetings	17	30	26	87
Political Campaigns	20	18	16	71
Acting as Poling agents	47	11	20	51
Collecting subscriptions	13	7	12	30

Based on Chi-square analysis, the present study indicates that age had no impact on the participation rate in political activities. The presence of high involvement in politics is not seen in either the Hindu or Muslim or Christian communities irrespective of the sectors they are placed in. Again, low level of political activism is prevalent among all women especially reserved categories of SCs, STs and OBCs. Thus, inspite of reservation of seats in legislative bodies, caste has not been able to increase the level of political ambition and activism among women. This study reveals that education did not increase the turnout rate of the women. More specifically it can be inferred that more the level of education political apathy among the number of women have increased and they have preferred to abstain from being politically active. It is also observed that women irrespective of their marital status are not active in political matters both in the selected groups of formal and informal sectors For married women, the important male influential are their husbands, while for single women, fathers play an important role in opinion changes. It is held that citizens who have higher incomes or have higher family incomes are more likely to live and work in environments that stimulate interest in politics, create social pressures for political participation, and provide opportunities for political participation. However the data revealed that the trend of minimum involvement is observed in the formal sectors where with the rise in the level of income women have tend to become more cautious before taking part in political activities as the number of women having high scores have decreased. It is also observed by the researcher that women's voting behaviour is also influenced by their family and they lack the power as well as the right of individual decision- making.

FORMAL SECTOR.

In the formal sector about **260 (49.52%**) and women said that they vote in favour of the same political party supported by their parents, husbands or in-laws. They are thus guided by them or are forced to vote in favour of the party they choose. **65 (12.38%))** women said they do not vote**. Out of 180 (39.13%) women**,**108 (60%)** said that they follow their family loyalty while only **72 (40%)** vote by their own will without any outside pressure.

Table 1

Pattern of voting Behaviour	Influenced by Family	Not influenced by Family	Do not Vote
Vote in Favour of the same party as family supports	260	200	65
Loyal to the same party for 10 yrs or more.(180)	108	72	
Change of partisan preference after 2011	250	110	
		Total No of Women: 525	

Out of 460 women, **240(52.17%)** women said that they consult their family members before going out to vote. , **150(62.50%**) said that they have changed their voting pattern after consultation. **90(37.50%)** women were not influenced. Hence it can be inferred that most women have changed their own mindset based on consultation.

Table 2

Voting Pattern	No of women	
Consult with family members	240	
Consult with outside members along with family members.	160	
Changed their preference after consultation	Influenced	Not Influenced
	150	90

INFORMAL SECTOR

In the informal sector about **285(54.29%**) **followed the footsteps of their family members while voting** and only **160(30.48%)** voted individually. Out of them **161 (70%)** said they follow their family loyalty while only **69 (30%)** vote by their own will without any outside pressure.

Table 3

Pattern of voting Behaviour	Influenced by Family	Not influenced by Family	Do not Vote
Vote in Favour of the same party as family supports	285	160	80
Loyal to the same party for 10 yrs or more.(230)	161	69	
Change of partisan preference after 2011	300	145	
		Total No of Women: 525	

250(69.44%) said that they have changed their voting pattern after consultation. **110(30.55%)** women were not influenced.200 women said that they also consult other educated and respectable persons in their locality and workplace before casting their vote.

Table 4

Voting Pattern	No of women	
Consult with family members	360	
Consult with outside members along with family members.	200	
Changed their preference after consultation	Influenced	Not Influenced
	250	110

Based on Chi-square and analysis of voting pattern the researcher has come to the conclusion that age, religion, caste or education have not established any significant change in the attitude of women in taking independent decision in voting or partisan preference. However, it is pertinent to mention that the change in partisan preference has been both positive and negative. The influence exercised by outside persons have sometimes helped the respondents in creating their own opinion while there are number of respondents who have changed their preference out of fear from political cadres and local goons. Again, the reasons of changing the voting preference have been varied.

In case of both formal and informal sectors certain members outside the family influence the choice of preference and voting behaviour of women. The influence of-the socio-economic

variables on partisan preference of respondents reveals some interesting facts. The scheduled castes and OBCs have scored much higher in terms of independent decision making than the upper castes All women irrespective of marital status lack the power of independent decision-making in the field of partisan choice. Rather it is pertinent to mention that more than unmarried and married women in all the four groups, divorced and separated women have at least scored a little better in following her independent will. The hypothesis was framed that economic status of the respondent does not influence the power of independent choice of decision making. The hypothesis has been retained in all the groups.

The researcher's data and corresponding analysis of the study therefore indicates that women's participation in the electoral process has shown a steady increase, but their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. Throughout this study, the researcher has sought to examine the degree of political participation of women of West Bengal, Such, a study cannot, obviously, establish a general theory of political behaviour of women. Still, it may be hoped that it will contribute, at least to some extent, to the establishment of a theory which may have extensive application. Both from survey data and official data, the researcher finds that women's political mobilization is increasing but their participation in politics as compared to that of men is still less. The gap, however, is diminishing. The large masses of women still continue to lack spokesmen, some of the researcher's findings regarding the association between some political factors and socio-economic variables are contrary to some common assumptions. For example, age, caste, status, religion, education, marital status and income are found not to have any significant impact on political participation or in increasing the level of independent choice over decision-making either in the family or in their voting pattern. These findings may reveal new areas for further investigations.

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